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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 001001

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INTRODUCTORY CALL ON MINISTER OF
DEFENSE ABIYEV

REF: BAKU 991

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse; reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During the Ambassador's July 7 introductory call, Minister of Defense General-Colonel Safar Abiyev stressed that the U.S.-Azerbaijani relationship is both strategic and special and that U.S. assistance has allowed Azerbaijan to integrate closer with the West. The Minister was pleased with the close military-to-military cooperation between the two countries, and looks forward to realizing the NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan that Azerbaijan adopted last year. When asked, he promised to assist in clearing up legal issues to allow the U.S. to help Azerbaijan secure its maritime borders under the Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation Prevention Initiative. He also expressed significant disagreement with the U.S. policy regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, particularly U.S. limitations on security assistance. The Minister stated that the OSCE Minsk Group is ineffective and that Azerbaijan does not expect any positive results from it. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) During her July 7 introductory call on Minister of Defense Safar Abiyev, the Ambassador reviewed the U.S. priorities for the bilateral relationship: global and regional security, energy security, and democratic and economic reform. The Ambassador emphasized that the April meeting between President Aliyev and President Bush had laid the groundwork to broaden the U.S.-Azerbaijani relationship, and said that she looks forward to working with the Azerbaijani government and people in these areas. The Ambassador thanked the Minister for Azerbaijan's contributions to military operations in Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Iraq, noting that Azerbaijan was one of the first countries to offer support to America after the tragic events of September 11, 2001. The Ambassador emphasized that the U.S. recognizes the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and supports a peaceful, negotiated resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as the resumption of hostilities would be disastrous for the entire region.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador also complimented Azerbaijan's NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan and ongoing efforts to increase interoperability with NATO. She urged the Minister to move forward expeditiously, such as by upgrading one airbase to NATO standards. Emphasizing U.S. support for Azerbaijan's efforts to improve its WMD interdiction capabilities, the Ambassador urged the Minister to provide a letter that clearly designates the Azerbaijani Navy as an

implementing executive agent for the Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation Prevention Initiative (ref). The Minister was surprised to hear that this letter had not been sent already by the Cabinet of Ministers, and instructed his staff to take action to resolve this immediately.

¶4. (C) The Minister congratulated the Ambassador on her appointment, and wished her success in her endeavors. He thanked the U.S. for its support and assistance from 1994 onward, noting that without this assistance, Azerbaijan's independence would not have been assured. He said that this is why Azerbaijan was one of the first states to offer its support to the United States after the attacks on September 11, 2001. Stressing that the relationship between Azerbaijan and the United States is both strategic and special, he also expressed gratitude for U.S. leadership and assistance in establishing the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and helping Azerbaijan work towards NATO integration, particularly through the Partnership for Peace program. The Minister agreed that President Aliyev's recent visit to the United States underscored the close relationship between the two countries.

¶5. (C) Abiyev said that Azerbaijan's troop contributions to Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and in Kosovo, are all examples of this close bilateral cooperation. Azerbaijan's vigorous participation in the Partnership for Peace program, adoption of the NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) and progress toward those IPAP goals in the form of the Non-Commissioned Officers Academy and improving one airfield to NATO standards, are demonstrations of Azerbaijan's commitment to closer integration with the West. The Minister informed the Ambassador that the Ministry

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had just decided to ask for one permanent U.S. instructor to help mentor students at the Non-Commissioned Officers Academy.

¶6. (C) When pressed by the Ambassador on his vision of how to achieve Azerbaijan's NATO IPAP goals, the Minister did not express any details, but did reiterate the importance of interoperability in general. When the Ambassador mentioned that from recent briefings from the U.S. Department of Defense she fully understands the U.S. desire to spur completion of IPAP, such as by adopting a NATO-compatible airfield, the Minister indicated that he was ready and that he saw no real problems. He also stated that he would discuss this with DASD McDougall, with whom he is good friends, and who is supposed to visit him in the next few months. The Ambassador offered to work vigorously with Azerbaijan to strengthen the bilateral relationship.

¶7. (C) The Minister told the Ambassador that he is dissatisfied by the international community's approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. He said he is particularly dissatisfied by the U.S. policy of parity in security assistance to both sides, particularly because Russia provides significant amount of aid to Armenia. Abiyev stated that although more than ten train echelons of Russian equipment had been withdrawn from Georgia through Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan knows that more than that is flowing into Armenia. He said that he has information that Armenia continues to receive significant amount of money from Russia to support its military forces. Abiyev also noted that Armenia has another close ally in Iran, which provides real assistance to Armenia in all areas: economic, political, and military.

¶8. (C) Emphasizing his continued support for the U.S.-Azerbaijani relationship, the Minister nevertheless said he disagrees with U.S. policy on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. He alleged that the United States applies a "double standard" towards Azerbaijan, even though the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territory are recognized internationally, including by United Nations resolutions. The Minister argued

that the United States should apply the same standard as it applies when defending the territorial integrity of Moldova, Chechnya, and Abkhazia. He also stated that the United States has a double standard by coming to the defense of Kuwait and Bosnia-Herzegovina when they were occupied, but not by defending Azerbaijan. He believes that this Armenian occupation is a fundamental issue of human rights for all displaced persons, much as it was in these other countries, and that the United States has a double standard when it comes to protecting human rights.

19. (C) The Minister asserted that Azerbaijanis see the U.S. &double standards8 as rooted in the fact that Azerbaijan is a Muslim nation, while Armenia is Christian. He said that he was surprised by and did not understand the U.S. decision to recognize Armenian progress toward democracy by granting it Millennium Challenge Account assistance, arguing that Armenian occupation of Azerbaijan,s territory undercut its democratic credentials. The Minister stated that Azerbaijan is not satisfied with the work of the OSCE Mins Group, and does not expect any positive results from it. Abiyev told the Ambassador that "Azerbaijan will never part with one square centimeter of its territory."

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